

Special Events

A special event is usually a one-day activity to celebrate walking and bicycling to school. Most often, families walk or bicycle from home or from a group meeting area. Signs, balloons and banners can be used to create an air of excitement and celebration. When they arrive at the school, participants might be greeted by the school principal or a school mascot and receive snacks and small gifts like stickers. A press conference, songs, flag salute or other group activity round out the event.



Justin Booth

International Walk to School Day at Early Childhood Center 61, Buffalo, New York.



Jewel Johnson

International Walk to School Day at Edgecombe Elementary, Baltimore, Maryland.

Strategy: Special Event

Description

- Specially designated day when families walk or bicycle to school.
- May include a group walk from a designated meeting point, healthy snacks, giveaways for children, an assembly, media coverage and/or the use of walkability and bikeability checklists.

Advantages

- Less labor intensive than ongoing activities.
- Opportunity to engage broader community, including politicians and other community leaders, and bring visibility for Safe Routes to School.
- Opportunity to gain media coverage.

Considerations

- Requires providing a route, or routes, that will be safe for all participants which may not be a route from their homes.
- Limited ability to promote daily walking to school.

Quick steps for a special event

1. Find partners including parents, school personnel, law enforcement and community members.
2. Plan the celebration, including a safe route and any needed volunteers and incentives.
3. For International Walk to School events in the United States, register at www.walktoschool.org/register.
4. Promote the event.
5. Have fun.

See www.walktoschool.org/getstarted/index.cfm for tools, activities and detailed information.

International Walk to School Events

International Walk to School Day, held in October each year, joins children and adults from around the world to celebrate walking and bicycling to school.

This event can be a fun way to kick off an SRTS program. In fact, many participating communities use the event to work towards creating safe environments that support walking and bicycling every day. A survey of U.S. Walk to School Coordinators in 2002 found that 43 percent were working towards making permanent changes in conjunction with their event, and that percentage is on the rise.^{1, 2} In 2005, over one-half of registered events were part of ongoing activities at the school to promote bicycling and walking.³

Since it began in the United States in 1997, participation, both within the United States and in other countries, has grown every year. The event's popularity led to the establishment of October as International Walk to School Month, giving communities the flexibility to celebrate on a single day, week or throughout the month. Information about how to register for and plan a local event can be found at www.walktoschool.org. Also see the 2005 International Walk to School Report at www.walktoschool.org/resources/reports.cfm.



Jen Cole



Anne Le Reverend

Walking to Vallecito School in San Rafael, California.

Walkability and Bikeability Checklists

Walkability and bikeability checklists are designed for use by parents, children, school officials and other community members to assess the safety conditions of the route to school. They are often used during special events to get children and adults to think about what is good and what needs to be improved along the school route. Results are summarized and shared with decision makers and media to help gain support for needed improvements. Easy to use tools like the Walkability and Bikeability checklists are good ways for the public to identify the issues that need to be addressed. See the Engineering chapter for information about other assessment tools.

Download the Walkability Checklist at www.walkinginfo.org/walkingchecklist.cfm and the Bikeability Checklist at www.bicyclinginfo.org/cps/checklist.cfm.

Walkability Checklist

How walkable is your community?

Take a walk with a child and decide for yourselves.

Everyone benefits from walking. These benefits include improved fitness, clean air, reduced risk of certain health problems, and a greater sense of community. The walking route is to be safe and easy. Take a walk with your child and use this checklist to decide if your neighborhood is a friendly place to walk. Take heart if you find problems, there are ways you can make things better.

Getting started:

First, you'll need to pick a place to walk, like the route to school, a friend's home or just somewhere fun to go.

The second step involves the checklist. Read over the checklist before you go, and as you walk, note the location of things you would like to change.

At the end of your walk, give each question a rating. Then add up the numbers to see how you rate your walk route.

After you've rated your walk and identified any problem areas, the next step is to figure out what you can do to improve your community's walk. You'll find both immediate actions and long-term solutions under "Improving Your Community's Score..." on the third page.



Putting It Into Practice: International Walk to School Day

Hinsdale Consolidated School District, Hinsdale, IL

A few years ago, Hinsdale parents, school administration and community leaders were concerned about the increasing traffic congestion and the decreasing number of walkers around their seven neighborhood schools. Through collaboration with schools, villages and other governing bodies, their first Walk to School event was held.

The first year's celebration was promoted with the slogans, "Feel the Power of the Fourth" and "May the Fourth be With You", and signs with Yoda from Star Wars on them. The Star Wars theme was used to remind participants of the October 4th Walk to School date. As part of the day, participants were asked to complete walkability checklists in order to learn more about safety concerns along walk routes. Students and their families along with caregivers, law enforcement officers, firefighters, local, state and federal political leaders, teachers and staff, all wearing walk to school buttons, arrived at school on foot. A short flag pole ceremony and recognition of dignitaries and supporters wrapped up the event.

The Walk to School celebration described here as well as those held in subsequent years brought visibility to pedestrian safety concerns, which helped build support for a planned network of sidewalks, with the focus on providing walkways to schools, parks, and other locations generating pedestrian traffic. Other school based activities, including classroom lessons, mileage clubs and incentives have been initiated to meet the interest in promoting walking.⁴

Other Special Events

Many communities choose to have more than one Walk to School Day during the year, and some expand their event to include bicyclists, parents and drivers. "Walk and Roll to School Day" is a popular theme for many, but some places choose a separate day to celebrate bicycling including Earth Day, Trail Day, Car Free Day, Bicycle-to-Work Day and Bike Month. Traffic Safety Day, another event theme, provides an opportunity to include education for drivers. See the Education chapter for more information on safety days.



Mesa, Arizona

Putting It Into Practice: Cycle Saturation Project

St John's Catholic Primary School, Rotherhithe, United Kingdom

St. John's Primary School has taken up bicycling with great enthusiasm as a result of a £20,000 (approximately \$34,000) local project funded by Rotherhithe Community Council. The funds have been used for bicycle training, bicycle events and bicycle racks to encourage bicycling to school as an alternative to riding in a motor vehicle.

Southwark Cyclists (www.southwarkcyclists.org.uk), the project coordinators, selected St. John's school because of the principal's support and the students' enthusiasm, 84 percent of whom expressed a desire to bicycle to school. The key reason for the school's involvement was concerns about the traffic congestion during pick-up and drop-off times.

The Cycle Saturation project, managed on a day-to-day basis by SEA/RENUE (www.sustainable-energy.org.uk), built on the students' desires to bicycle to school by providing bicycle training for all interested students. Cycle Training UK (www.cycletraining.co.uk) provided the instructors to train students, parents and teachers and conducted maintenance workshops to ensure that the students' bicycles were well-maintained. The project also added new bicycle racks because the existing ones were full every day.

The school also planned a series of events to complement the training, beginning in April with an event that included bicycle games. In June, all children and adults who bicycled that month were invited to a Bicycle Breakfast. The events were capped by a Bike Week bicycling celebration. With the help of Southwark Cyclists, these events were held jointly with a neighboring school where bicycling was already very popular. For the following school year, a bicycle club was planned in order to build on the momentum of the project and ensure that the bicycle racks stay full in the future.

Putting It Into Practice: Monthly Walk and Roll to School Days

Mason Elementary, Duluth, GA

When the Safe Routes to School project started at suburban Mason Elementary School, just a handful of the 1,200 students walked to school and only one bicycled. So when the first "Walk and Roll to School Day" was planned, organizers weren't sure the event would be much of a success. Organizers reported that over 100 kids walked with the Walking School Bus, 50 joined the Bicycle Train, lots of parents came out and the enthusiasm for the now-monthly Walk and Roll to School Days hasn't let up since.

To keep it interesting, each monthly Walk and Roll event at Mason had a special theme. In November, with growing darkness, the theme was "Be Safe, Be Seen." In January it was "A Polar Bear Walk and Roll" to encourage walking and bicycling in cold weather. Children were greeted with hot chocolate and a giant painted polar bear. In February, the theme focused on healthy hearts; in March, kids were encouraged to "Be One Less Car." At the end of the school year, the theme was a retrospective of the year's Walk and Roll events including a picture album and a banner decorated with students' personal reflections on walking and bicycling to school. One fifth grader tearfully lamented moving on to middle school because she would miss these special days.

Organizers reported that the Walk and Roll events at Mason have planted the seeds for daily walking and bicycling. The new bicycle racks are often full, walking and bicycling has become "cool" to do, and the "coolest" kids try to hide their excitement on Walk and Roll Days. "What's the big deal?" they said, "We do this every day!"